



**For Immediate Release
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**Contact: Representative Spiros
(608) 266-1182**

Rep Spiros Op-Ed: State Budget Progress

Communication continues despite delay

One of the most important jobs that I do as your representative is to help craft the state budget. Recently, there has been quite a bit of news coverage on the process. I would like to share information about the current status of the budget and background on the process in general. We want to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars and prioritize the needs of Wisconsin, and it is my goal to keep you well-informed on the decisions we are making on your behalf.

The Wisconsin State Budget is a biennial two-year budget. This means the budget is crafted and voted on at the beginning of every legislative session, which all spans two years. This particular budget is the 2017-2019 state budget. Ideally, the state budget should be in place by the beginning of the new fiscal year on July 1st. However, unlike the federal government, Wisconsin does not shut down if a budget is not passed by that date. The state continues to operate under the old spending plan.

We want the best possible budget for the state and we have been working on it for months. The budget is first proposed by the governor. Then, it is sent to the legislature for modifications after many hours of public hearings and testimony from around the state. Once the budget committee, the Joint Committee on Finance, (JFC) has completed its work, the budget then goes to both the Senate and the Assembly where it has to be passed by both houses in identical form before it can be signed by the governor.

During the budget process, I have offered numerous motions including one to reinstate the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) magazine. After hearing from many constituents about their interest in seeing the publication continue, I submitted language to the JFC and the members ultimately voted to retain the publication. Once the transportation portion of the budget is heard, I am hopeful that my motion to index all costs of transportation related items, which currently are part of GPR, will be moved to the transportation fund, where they should be. This is something other states have done and will be a direct benefit to sustaining our infrastructure.

As we continue to work on the transportation budget, I want to share with you the feedback that I received from our area and my opinions on some of the funding options. Based on my constituent survey results, nearly 45% of respondents agreed with raising the gas tax, while only 17% expressed a desire to see tollways added to our state roadways. While I appreciate the legislature and the governor seeking a long-term solution to our transportation funding crisis, I

JOHN SPIROS

State Representative • 86th Assembly District

believe other options besides tolling can still be considered as part of a comprehensive plan. Developing toll roads is a long, complicated process that will not see immediate revenue for our state. Toll roads require federal permission which can take years to acquire. Furthermore, the revenue collected from toll roads can only be used to improve/maintain the roadway from which it was collected or direct access roads/points leading to the toll road.

I also have concerns about proposed mileage fees of an additional 20 cents per mile that would be placed on many small and large trucking companies. Trucking companies use the roadways 10% but pay close to 40% of the taxes and fees for the roadways.

Any solution to the transportation funding issue should include reforms. According to a recent audit of the Department of Transportation (DOT), project overruns have already cost the state and the taxpayers millions of dollars. Many of the current projects were not properly or accurately calculated to include inflation, therefore reflecting an incorrect project cost overall.

I am appreciative of the action taken by Speaker Robin Vos on the issue in recent days; asking the Wisconsin Manufactures and Commerce (WMC) and the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association (WMCA) to offer suggestions on how to best address the problem, both in the short and long term.

Despite the fact the July 1 has passed, there is still time to ensure we have a solid budget that will benefit the most residents of Wisconsin in the best ways. I would like to continue to hear your thoughts, ideas and suggestions. I encourage you to contact me in addition to Governor Walker and Senator Jerry Petrowski. Together, we can continue the dialogue and make sure we are moving Wisconsin "Forward"!

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